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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: HEIRS TO SHIA POWER MEET TO DISCUSS REGIONAL SECURITY AND  
POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

CLASSIFIED BY: Charles Hunter, Regional Coordinator, REO Al  
Hillah, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ammar Al Hakim and Mohamed Ridha Al Sistani, sons to two of Shia Islam's most important leaders, met on August 24 to discuss a wide range of issues. The two men spoke about the continuing problem of militias and how "Public Committees" might enhance security. Al Sistani voiced his father's concerns over the initiative. Al Hakim and Al Sistani went on to speak about the problem of displaced persons in southern Iraq, the responsibility of the national government in returning people to their homes and the need for elected officials to be responsive and responsible to the people of Iraq. Finally, they touched on the importance of good security during the upcoming Sha'baniya pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbala. End summary.

¶2. (C) On August 24, Ammar Al Hakim, son of SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz Al Hakim made a call on the home of the Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani. When Al Hakim arrived his meeting was with Mohamed Ridha Al Sistani, the Ayatollah's son. The conversation lasted three hours and was reported by a contact known to SET Najaf. The meeting commenced with a discussion of the reservations Al Sistani's father has regarding "Public Committees." (Note: "Public Committees" are "community watch" organizations created to patrol neighborhoods in the Southern Provinces. They are made up of SCIRI loyalists. End note.) According to the younger Al Sistani, his father believes that it is "the national government that should have to destroy the militias." He is leery of any organization that operates outside of the auspices of the national elected government, according to his son.

¶3. (C) The problem of displaced persons has long been a subject of consternation for Ayatollah Sistani, allowed his son. "The national government should make every possible effort to restore displaced persons to their homes," Mohamed Ridha Al Sistani said to Al Hakim. This should be done "without irritating ethnic sensibilities," noted Al Sistani. This raised the question of the national government and their efforts on behalf of the Iraqi people. Speaking for his father, the younger Al Sistani said that the Ayatollah would recommend to the government that no Iraqi politician should leave the country for vacation and "leave the Iraqi people to endure this crisis alone. They should stay in Iraq and do the bidding of the Iraqi people, because they were elected to serve, not be served," Mohamed Ridha Al Sistani quoted his father as saying.

¶4. (C) The meeting turned, finally, to upcoming religious holidays. Al Sistani expressed his (and his father's) hope that pilgrims would visit the Holy Shrines (both in Najaf and Karbala) during Sha'baniya, the celebration of the births of a number of the Imam's of Shia Islam; most notably the 12th Imam, Mahdi. "It is important," Al Sistani noted, "that pilgrims take great care to avoid becoming the target of extremists." To this end, Sistani said that the Hawza would be "watching closely for the work of national security forces to ensure the safety of the pilgrims." Sistani then said that his father would call on "all Iraqi Muslims, young and old, to make the Hajj to the holy

shrines in Karbala and Najaf for the Sha'baniya."

¶15. (C) Comment: Most notable in the meeting of these heirs to Shia power was the fact that Al Sistani said that his father had reservations about "Public Committees." It was no doubt Al Hakim's father, as head of SCIRI, who proposed and implemented "Public Committees." It is rare that such a wide-reaching initiative (the program would mobilize throughout south-central Iraq) would be undertaken without seeking the complete approval of the Hawza. Security has become a major concern for SCIRI, though, and with the push for federalism all but certain this fall, it is of paramount importance to SCIRI that Najaf (the likely capital of any southern federal state) and its neighbor provinces appear secure. End comment.

HUNTER